

“Our Hmong Veterans fought shoulder to shoulder with American soldiers during the Vietnam war,” “Many paid the ultimate sacrifice and I am proud that Hmong Veterans now call places like our Valley home. Our nation owes a debt of gratitude to these patriotic individuals and their service should be honored with burial benefits in our National Cemeteries.” said Costa.

Officers from the CIA's Special Activities Division trained and led Hmong men in Laos and into Vietnam during the war. These forces numbered in the tens of thousands and conducted direct missions against Communist forces and North Vietnamese supporters.

Since the end of the conflict in Vietnam, thousands of Hmong families have resettled in areas around the country. As a result of legislation signed by President Ford in 1975, today they are legal permanent residents or United States Citizens.

Currently, burial benefits are available to veterans and Members of the U.S. Armed Services, their spouses and dependants, Reserve Officers, Public Health Service Officers, Merchant Mariners from World War II, and the Philippine Armed Forces. This legislation would add Hmong veterans to the list of individuals eligible for interment in National Cemeteries after they undergo a verification and documentation process by the Department of Veterans Affairs to certify their service.

There are approximately 6,900 Hmong veterans that would be eligible for these burial benefits. It's estimated that less than 3,000 of these veterans would actually take advantage of the benefits if made eligible for burial today.

Costa was joined by 22 other Members of Congress in introducing the bill.